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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the results of a literature review regarding effective time management strategies, with primary emphasis directed to the field of school counseling. This review addresses the following: the historical development of time management; goal setting and prioritization of tasks; delegation of responsibility; time saving tips; and supplementary suggestions. Recommendations and implications are offered for time management approaches for counselors who desire to enhance their effective use of time. These conclusions are presented: (1) prioritization of tasks, delegation of responsibility, and ongoing control of paperwork contribute to effective and more professional performance; (2) organization and coordination are crucial in providing effective services; (3) counselors can increase their effectiveness by designing and following short and long term goals and objectives, prioritizing tasks, recruiting staff and volunteers, and maintaining an organized work environment; and (4) counselors might alleviate time management problems by sharing time management problems with administrators, inservice training, or coursework focusing on organization. The report concludes that although time management can be a major challenge for school counselors, achievement of effective management of time is possible. (ABL)

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Effective Time Management Strategies For School Counselors

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Abstract

Counselors hold multiple responsibilities in providing comprehensive services to students, teachers, administrators, and the community. Such multiple responsibilities can create time management problems for practitioners. This paper summarizes the results of a literature review regarding effective time management strategies, with primary emphasis directed to the field of school counseling. Recommendations and implications are offered for time management approaches for counselors who desire to enhance their effective use of time.

Effective Time Management Strategies for School Counselors

Time is a precious commodity. "It is precious because it can't be stored or recovered" (Burton, 1984, p. 3). Locating material on time management is not an easy task (An Update, 1979). Time management, in a study at the Northtside Independent School District, was deemed essential in effecting change, particularly in providing comprehensive guidance services to all students (Gysbers & Henderson 1988). Evidence also exists that experienced counselors struggle with management of time . In compiling results of a management training workshop evaluation, it was discovered that 50% of those trained identified lack of time as a major challenge in continued team development of comprehensive guidance plans and overall task completion (Perry & VanZandt, 1989).

The purpose of this report is to present multiple time management strategies as found in the literature and to demonstrate their applicability to the practice of school counseling. Although emphasis is placed on school counseling, strategies in non-counseling professions are identified as consistent with those of school counselors.

Review of the Literature

This review addresses the following: the historical development of time management, goal setting and prioritization of tasks, delegation of responsibility, time saving tips, and supplementary suggestions.

Historical Background

The evolution of strategic time management concerns dates back to the Industrial Era according to Blyton, Hassard, Hill, and Starkey (1989). They believed that effective time management, until the past decade, was fully dependent on the use of the clock. Their multiple studies indicate that productivity, particularly during the first half of this century was equated with increased speed at

which tasks were completed, extension of hours for completion, and increased financial profit, as a primary goal. They further state that it was not until the 1970's that consideraton was given to structured time scheduling, time analysis, and qualitative vs quantitative time usage. Schwartz (1975) pointed out that, in the business sector, industrial personnel believed that increased technology would allow for more time for task completion, and that automation would enhance effective use of time.

In the school counseling field, time management twenty-five years ago focused on actual time spent in specific task completion. For example, in a study by Ashcroft (1966), counselors reported having problems in finding time for test interpretation and for clerical duties, rather than sharing concerns regarding comprehensive management of multiple guidance activities. Strategic time management according to Smith & McDonough (1965) involved adherence to schedules as a means of managing daily tasks. During the 1970's, concerns

surrounded development of short- and long-term goals and objectives (Halverson, 1974; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975). Through the past decade researchers such as Eddy, Richardson, & Alberg (1982), Myrick (1987), and Stripling (1986) indicated that time management has become a complex process and that effective time management increases counselors' abilities to manage guidance programs and increase program accountability.

Primary time management techniques appear to be prioritization of tasks and goal setting tasks, delegation of responsibility, and minimizing wasted time:

Prioritization and Goal-Setting

Establishing and following clear and attainable goals and objectives is encouraged (Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Halverson, 1974). "Anticipation management," coined by Eddy, Richardson, & Alberg (1982) is a technique for preventative planning, which is an effort to minimize potential crises. They believe that when specific planned activities are considered ahead of time and

built into planned schedules, time is used in a more organized manner. Stripling (1986) further considers "service management" for all students as a primary form of goal development (p. 225). In other words, coordination and organized management result in effective provision of multiple services.

Prioritization is a crucial time management strategy as described by several authors (Burton, 1984; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Eddy, Richardson, & Alberg, 1982; Halverson, 1974; Haynes, 1987; Lakein 1973; Myrick, 1987; and Wilkinson, 1988). Eddy, Richardson, & Alberg (1982) believe that priorities need to be clarified as an important initial task. Wilkinson (1988) states that prioritization of goals and plans, in addition to reduction of less important tasks, contributes to effective management of time. Prioritizing "to do lists," according to Burton (1984), and use of quiet time for high priority tasks, result in effective completion of tasks. A number of authors (Colorado State Department of Education , 1975; Halverson, 1974; Haynes 1987; Myrick ,1987) concur that

prioritization of activities is a practical and important approach to time management.

Delegation of Responsibility

Delegation of responsibility is another major topic in time management. Miller & Miller (1979) note that "through delegation of responsibility, others get meaningful and challenging duties" (p. 4). Burton (1984) states that, "Delegation of responsibility prevents reverse delegation" (p, 22). Persons are thus expected to make decisions for themselves rather than depending on superiors to make the decisions for them . Giving students responsibility is described by Burton (1984) as a tool for delegation. When students are given responsibility, self-esteem and overall empowerment is increased (An Update, 1979; Cohen & Hart-Hester, 1987; Eddy, Richardson & Alberg, 1982; Myrick, 1987).

Training clerical staff and volunteers to assist with routine tasks is another means of delegation. Training personnel to screen phone calls and limiting voluntary activities saves considerable

time (Burton, 1984; Cohen & Hart-Hester, 1987; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Halverson, 1984; Miller & Miller, 1979; Stripling, 1986; Wilkinson, 1988).

Time Saving

Another important and common time management strategy is the elimination of "time wasters," such as telephone interruptions, inefficient meetings, visitors, junk mail, cluttered and disorganized work space, procrastination, the inability to say "No," and over perfectionism (An Update, 1979; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Haynes, 1987; Shipman & Martin, 1983; Stripling, 1986). It is stated in An Update (1979) that, "The greatest time saving word you have in your vocabulary is `No'". (p. 4). The use of effective filing systems, as well as development and adherence to specific policies, are a useful tool for eliminating time wasters (Shipman & Martin, 1983; Stripling, 1986). Cohen & Hart-Hester (1987) specify the need to develop efficient and unduplicated paperwork to save time in corresponding

and documenting data. Keeping meetings concise, timely, and task-oriented, is deemed useful (Aquila, 1988; Burton, 1984; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Halverson, 1974; Haynes, 1987; Myrick, 1987). This allows personnel to stay on task and use time for planning and organization.

Much time is often wasted reviewing and re-reviewing notes, messages, letters,and miscellaneous paperwork. Therefore, daily paperwork and mail needs to be dealt with immediately upon receipt, only once (not placed in piles to review later,) and finally, discarded (An Update, 1979; Haynes, 1987; Stripling, 1986).

Stripling (1986) adds that self-help sheets with problem solving procedures (for daily and routine concerns) might be posted for others to use. This would minimize repetition in requests for assistance in routine matters.

Shipman & Martin (1983) view disorganized and cluttered desks as significant barriers to time management. They suggest that the time used in developing a system of environmental organization is worthwhile.

Supplemental Suggestions

Eddy, Richardson, and Alberg (1982) stress application of knowledge and skills in management of time and in school counseling "in a more active than reactive, more purposeful than trial and error, more self-directed than outer directed, and more oriented to specific others in problem solving" (p. 123). Use of these skills not only instills student and staff responsibility, but serves as a form of prevention, minimizing ongoing repetition of daily problems whether they be routine or crisis-related.

Daily record keeping, according to Wilkinson (1988), allows counselors to visually review ongoing activities and overall progress. In addition, counselors can use this data to demonstrate the purposes and needs for continued provision of services. Aquila (1988) discusses the need for varied time schedules to minimize potential boredom. In addition, he recommends taking frequent re-energyzing breaks. He further suggests that fear of failure is a common problem which can keep persons from getting started on projects. Burton (1984) proposes breaking

large projects into smaller step-by-step tasks through the use of outlines. He explains further that crossing off completed tasks from lists also is important because persons are then able to see their accomplishments and move on to their next tasks.

Suggestions regarding clerical duties include the use of monthly tickler files (Stripling, 1986), memo pads and bulletin boards for messages and reminders (Aquila, 1988), pocket daytimers (Colorado State Department of Education, 1975), appointment books (An Update, 1979; Aquila, 1988), and tape recorders for note taking while traveling (Aquila, 1988).

Classroom guidance, small group work, and active student involvement, minimize repeated activities in the guidance program (Cohen & Hart-Hester 1987; Eddy, Richardson, & Alberg, 1982; Myrick, 1987; Stripling, 1986). Appointment calendars are essential for ongoing efficiency. They allow for clarification of deadlines, goal setting, and time frames (Burton, 1984; Haynes, 1987; Stripling, 1986).

There is consistent agreement that a major time management strategy is the use of accurate listening

skills (An Update, 1979; Colorado State Department of Education, 1975; Stripling, 1986). When information communicated is understood because it is initially heard accurately, time is saved in that repetition is limited.

Aquila (1988) indicates the applicability of time management strategies in daily life. Aquila (1988) states that, "You must plan time for yourself and for the personal part of your life. Regardless of the demands of the job, you must maintain a proper balance between work and family, demands and leisure, stress and recreation. Without such balance, you may simply have no time to manage" (p. 39).

Summary and Conclusions

Research indicates that strategic management of time involves several common methods. Prioritization of tasks, delegation of responsibility, and ongoing control of paperwork contribute to effective and more professional performance. Short and long-term planning, prioritization, and management of paperwork appear to be the most common time-saving strategies.

However, Gysbers & Henderson (1988) stress the emerging need for accountability. "Because counselors are the basic program resource, the recording of their actual program related behaviors is the most critical data you will gather" (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988 p. 99). They further stress that accountability is demonstrated through ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness and assessment of total school counseling needs. Each strategy reviewed appears useful for educational administration, special education, out-of-classroom services, student work, non-school related business, personal business, as well as school counseling.

Concerns regarding maximum use of time, lack of time, and making the most of limited time, are common and not limited to the school counseling profession. School counselors, however, are usually expected to provide academic, personal, and vocational counseling to all students, in addition to ongoing parent and teacher contacts, administrative tasks, and out-of-school community involvement. Therefore, organization and coordination are crucial in providing

effective services. Keirsey & Bates (1972) state, "The style in which time is spent distinguishes the professional who is effective from the one who is not, and, how much time to be allocated to a result, is a decision each professional has to make (p. 61)."

Provision of effective comprehensive services requires many counselor skills. Within the time management realm, counselors can increase their effectiveness by designing and following short and long term goals and objectives, prioritizing tasks, recruiting staff and volunteers, and maintaining an organized work environment.

School counselor concerns regarding not having time to attend meetings and develop comprehensive plans suggest that management of time is an issue throughout the state of Maine(Perry & VanZandt, 1989). If counselors are expected to provide quality services to students and maintain professional accountability, I would make several recommendations: Counselors might share time management problems and issues with administrators and other counselors to assess needs and determine compatible solutions. They also may benefit from inservice training or workshops sponsored outside their schools in the area

of management skill training. Last, counselors in training may benefit from coursework which directly focuses on organization, management of time, and the management of school counseling programs.

Although management of time can be a major challenge for school counselors, the outlined techniques suggest that achievement of effective management of time is possible. Learning skills in time management may initially appear to require additional start-up time. However, studies indicate that ultimate rewards exist in that more time becomes available for counselors to become effective and productive, thus creating a more satisfacatory climate for persons within the school counseling field.

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